

COVID-19, Religion, and Public Life Reflection

The COVID pandemic was, and continues to be, a strange and upsetting time. I remember the very beginning and how much hope I had for society. This was going to be a coming together of everyone for a common good. We were going to cloister in our homes, be still, draw together, let the earth take a collective sigh. I remember my Facebook feed – people baking bread, dolphins swimming in the canals of Venice, carbon emissions reducing worldwide. My parents did porch visits with the grandkids. The church I was attending at the time did a drive-in style worship service. Everyone parked in their cars and tuned to the same radio station, joining together even though we were physically distant from each other.

And then, seemingly suddenly, people grew tired of the pandemic and decided it was ‘over.’ They weren’t going to take such extreme precautions. They wanted life back to normal, not realizing life would never be exactly the same. This time in history was going to be marked as before-COVID and after-COVID. It felt like a break in the timeline, like life had forever shifted.

COVID revealed much about the individual. It was easy what someone’s priorities truly were. Was their focus on the greater good, or on their own comfort and convenience? It was, for me, both enraging and heartbreaking to see the mainstream church’s response, at least in the United States, to this pandemic. I had been involved in an ecumenical Christian organization for almost fifteen years when COVID hit. The leadership of this group quickly went back to large group retreats with no masks or vaccine cards required, and no precautions in place. It created such a cognitive dissonance within me. This was a group of people I felt I deeply knew, who I had, up until then, trusted implicitly and would have trusted with my life. It wounded me deeply to find that trust had been misplaced.

I was already very disillusioned with mainstream Christianity and had begun what many refer to as ‘deconstructing’ my faith. COVID, and the church’s response to it, pushed me even further. For a religion that proclaims, ‘love thy neighbor,’ and ‘do unto others,’ the actions of church leadership and individuals felt like the opposite. How could these people live in such a paradox?

In the wake of it all, I’ve found hope in finding others online and in-person who have felt the same way. I’ve found a new congregation with the same questions. I don’t believe the Church in America will be remembered well for how it handled this pandemic, but I hope to be part of a change that sees a more Christ-like response to future events.